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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9828
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000087

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2020

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SUBJECT: BURMA: NLD VICE-CHAIR U TIN OO RELEASED AFTER
DETENTION EXPIRES

Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (SBU) National League for Democracy (NLD) Vice-Chair U Tin Oo is free, following the February 13 expiration of his sixth year under house arrest. U Tin Oo resumed his leadership role in the NLD following his release, receiving party leaders and journalists at his home and attending a Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting on February 15. He is in good health and is scheduled to meet with the CDA late in the day February 16. End summary.

U Tin Oo Freed, Resumes NLD Activities

¶2. (C) Burmese authorities released Tin Oo from house arrest at 8:30 p.m. February 13. On February 14, U Tin Oo visited Rangoon's revered Shwedagon Pagoda and paid his respects to ailing NLD uncles, including party chair U Aung Shwe. U Tin Oo subsequently met with NLD leaders and journalists at his residence. According to NLD sources, U Tin Oo is in good health and anxious to return to politics. He attended a CEC meeting at NLD Headquarters February 15 and was warmly welcomed by party members. He will chair the selection board for the NLD's "Central Committee" on February 16-17. (Note: The "Central Committee" will comprise the second tier of NLD leadership. It is unclear what substantive duties the 80-120 CC members, whom the CEC will select from different parts of the country, will have. The CC was an NLD fixture until disbanded in 1997.) The Charge is scheduled to call on U Tin Oo late in the day on February 16.

¶3. (C) An Embassy contact told us U Tin Oo said the authorities required him to pledge not to engage in activities that would be detrimental to the people or the country. He agreed to the pledge, reportedly noting cynically that officials always require such "rubbish" and that he will immediately resume his political activities that always were and will be for the good of the Burmese people.

Background

¶4. (SBU) U Tin Oo (formerly General Tin Oo) was Commander-in-Chief and the Defense Minister from 1974 to 1976. He was accused of petty corruption and reportedly was suspected of fomenting a coup as well. He was dismissed from the military and imprisoned from 1976 to 1980. Upon his release, he became a monk for two years and then studied law. He became Vice-Chairman of the NLD on the party's founding in September 1988. He was imprisoned from 1989-1995 and was detained again without charge in May 2003 along with Aung San Suu Kyi following the Depeyin incident. After serving time in Kalay Prison (Sagaing Division), he was placed under house arrest in February 2004. Government officials renewed his house arrest order annually for the past six years, the maximum permitted under Burmese law.

Comment

¶5. (C) We expect the release of U Tin Oo and the arrival in Burma this week of UN Special Human Rights Rapporteur Ojea Quintana are not unrelated. The regime will point to U Tin Oo as "progress," while continuing to keep over 2,000 other political prisoners, including ASSK, in confinement.

Suggested Press Guidance

¶5. (SBU) We suggest the following points for use with the

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press:

-- We welcome the February 13 release from house arrest of National League for Democracy Vice-Chair U Tin Oo, as we call for the release of all the other political prisoners in Burma, including Aung San Suu Kyi and American prisoner Kyaw Zaw Lwin.

-- We urge the Burmese government to permit Aung San Suu Kyi to meet with U Tin Oo and the rest of her party's full leadership, as she requested in her November letter to Senior General Than Shwe.

Note: U Tin Oo had been in custody without charge since the May 2003 Depeyin incident, first in prison and then under house arrest. February 13 marked the end of his sixth consecutive year under house arrest, the maximum permitted by Burmese law.

DINGER